

KNOW YOUR PHONE

Shopping for Long Distance Phone Service

If you're like most people, your days are busy! You may not want to spend time choosing which phone company or long distance calling plan is right for you, **but if you don't shop around then you** may lose out when it comes to saving money. Here are some tips:

Take some time to learn, now that there's a competitive market. Many telecommunications companies want you to be their customer.

Look at your bill. Determine which numbers you're calling on a regular basis, and what time of day or evening you make most of your calls. Your review of your "calling habits" could lead to a better, less expensive calling plan for you.

Be prepared to ask good questions. Long distance phone companies will be calling you to explain their services. When they do, ask about their different plans, and how they can save you money.

Know about peak and off-peak pricing. Some providers have plans where you pay higher rates for peak times and lower rates for off-peak times. *Off-peak is usually between 5:00 p.m. - 8:00 a.m. and on the weekends.* Some carriers charge one rate at all times. These rates can be as little as IN - 12~ per minute.

Drive a hard bargain. If you don't like your phone rates, let your long distance carrier know you plan to shop around. Other carriers will be eager to win your business.

Watch for hidden costs. Make sure you know about any monthly fees, Directory Assistance charges, and per-call surcharges. Know whether your carrier rounds up to the next full minute when charging you, or bills you for as little as 6-second increments.

If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If you aren't sure an offer from an in-state long distance provider is legitimate, call 1-800-452-4699 and a Consumer Specialist will help you.

Be aware of slamming, which is when your chosen long distance carrier is switched without your knowledge or consent.

A free *Rate Watchers In-State Phone Guide*, which compares rates of various instate long distance companies, is available by calling the Office of the Public Advocate at 287-2445.

You may access our web page <http://www.state.me.us/mpuc/mtf.htm>

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